

Super Exhibit 15

by Steve Bellone | 03/22/2014 9:00 AM

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BARBARAELLEN KOCH FILE PHOTO | A view of Peconic Bay from Mattituck Beach.

This is the time for action. Recently, I announced the single most important initiative of my administration and what should be the single most important goal for all Long Islanders: curbing decades of nitrogen pollution we have been inflicting on our ground and surface waters here in Suffolk County.

Nitrogen pollution is public enemy No. 1 for our bays, waterways, drinking supply and the critical wetlands and marshes that protect us from natural disasters like superstorm Sandy.

The scope of the problem is grand: More than 350,000 homes in Suffolk County are not sewered and are contributing nearly 70 percent of the pollution. The primary source — but not the only source — of nitrogen pollution is failing septic systems and cesspools. Suffolk County is probably the only place in the world that has such a large density of people in such a tight a space, where the waste is going into a sole-source aquifer immediately beneath us that we're drinking.

This is of huge concern.

This nitrogen pollution is causing impaired water bodies, closed beaches, harmful algal blooms, decimated shellfish populations and, we now know, negative trends in the quality of our drinking water supply.

Nitrogen pollution has been systematically undermining our coastal wetlands. After the barrier beaches, our critical second line of defense against storms like Sandy are our wetlands and they have been devastated by nitrogen pollution in our water. I want to thank Gov. Cuomo, whose New York State 2100 Commission Report noted that "tidal wetlands can protect coastal communities from storm damage by reducing wave energy and amplitude, slowing water velocity and stabilizing the shoreline through sediment deposition."

This is not a problem that can be solved by one level of government or through one funding source. If we are going to solve this problem we must do it together. This is why we have launched a full-fledged public education campaign to put a spotlight on this issue for every Suffolk County resident. The only way to truly solve this problem is for all of us to engage ourselves in this issue, educate ourselves and stay diligent and focused on moving forward toward a solution.

On Monday, Jan. 27, I held a teleconference town hall-style event during which over 9,700 Suffolk County residents logged in to hear about the state of our water quality. This town hall was the beginning, the launch of the education campaign, and the first of many steps in what is sure to be a long journey to resolution. As Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment said, "Today will be known as the turning point."

I pledge to work with the scientific, environmental and business communities, as well as my colleagues on all levels of government, to identify and fund solutions.

I urge you to join me and the collaborative team we have brought together to save our water and in turn save the future of this great county. By staying informed on this issue, spreading the message and joining the cause, together we can save and protect this precious resource.

Steve Bellone, a Democrat, is the Suffolk County executive and a former Babylon Town supervisor. He lives in West Babylon.

Comments

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